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Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin and District recognizes National Mentoring Month

Written By PAULA BROWN

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin and District is celebrating the efforts of their volunteer mentors as they recognize National Mentoring Month.

National Mentoring Month is an annual campaign recognized in January, which looks to acknowledge the positive impacts of mentoring relationships, raise awareness about mentoring opportunities, and encourage community members to volunteer.

?Our volunteers mean everything to us. They truly are the ones that are having the impact on children, and by extension, our whole community, through the power of their mentoring,? said Nancy Stallmach, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin and District.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin and District has two key programs that volunteers can become mentors through.

The Community-Based Mentoring Program sees one child matched with an adult mentor, and the two meet once a week or every other week for a couple of hours. Big Brothers and Big Sisters works to match the ?big' and ?little' pairings with similar interests and encourages low-cost or no-cost activities. Some of the common activities include hiking, bike riding, playing at the park, baking, doing arts and crafts, or learning a new skill.

The local chapter also runs the In School Mentoring Program, which sees a volunteer mentor matched with a child at one of the schools in the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB). The mentor meets with the children once a week for one hour at the school during the school year.

Within the schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters also runs ?Go Girls? and ?Game On,? which are group programs that teach children about the benefits of active living, healthy eating, good self-esteem, and mental health.

?All of the children in our programs have faced adversity in some way, so these programs allow them to see a brighter future for themselves,? said Stallmach.

As they recognize the efforts of their volunteer mentors throughout January, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin is also hoping to share the need for more volunteers for their mentoring programs.

According to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin and District, they served over 200 children in all of their programs throughout the year and have around 45-50 volunteers who are mentors.

?We're currently looking for volunteers throughout Dufferin County, particularly we have a higher need for male volunteers,? said Stallmach.

Stallmach added that they currently have roughly 15 children on their waitlist. The majority of them are little brothers waiting for a big brother match.

?Some of them don't wait long at all, but some of them are waiting a while, especially if they're boys in the Shelburne area. It's an unfortunate thing that they do wait a while before we can find a match for them,? said Stallmach.

Becoming a volunteer mentor with Brothers Big Sisters does not require a specific qualification and volunteers are only asked for a one-year commitment.

?A good mentor is someone who likes spending time with other people and is willing to listen to the child to get to know them,? said Stallmach. ?It's a very rewarding volunteer experience for anyone who would like to make a positive impact on a particular child and also the community.?

Individuals who are interested in volunteering as a big brother or big sister can fill out an application form on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin and District website